

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

news release

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SNAIL DARTER SALVAGE OPERATIONS TO BEGIN

Fisheries experts from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Tennessee Valley Authority, and two other agencies will begin removing the remaining snail darters from the Little Tennessee River on Tuesday, October 2, and will transplant them to the Holston River. Officials of the Fish and Wildlife Service and TVA agreed upon the transplant on the recommendation of the Snail Darter Recovery Team.

The team met Monday, October 1, at TVA's Fisheries Laboratory in Norris, Tennessee, to make final preparations for the salvage effort scheduled to begin today. Fisheries biologists have about 4 weeks in which to find and remove all snail darters known to live on the shoal areas above the Tellico Dam.

The recovery team, which consists of representatives from the Fish and Wildlife Service, TVA, the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, and the University of Tennessee, was appointed by the Secretary of the Interior in June 1978 to study and recommend ways to help the fish survive and increase to the point where it is no longer endangered.

The rescue operation will be handled by an interagency team of biologists. The fish will be transplanted in containers filled with water from the Little Tennessee. When they arrive at the Holston, water from their new home will be gradually mixed with water from the container. Then the fish will be released into the Holston a few at a time. Only adult fish will be transplanted.

After the snail darters from above the Dam are removed, the recovery team has recommended that attention be given to the snail darter population known to live below the Dam. This population, consisting mostly of juveniles, will be removed and all juveniles taken to a Tennessee Wildlife

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Resources Agency fish hatchery until next summer to be released later in appropriate waters. Adult snail darters from this population will be transplanted to the Holston River.

In addition to the transplant operation, five pairs of adult snail darters from the Little Tennessee and 10 pairs from the Hiwassee River will be taken to a TVA laboratory, where biologists will study spawning and other propagation techniques to develop methods for raising snail darters in hatcheries. The 10 pairs from the Hiwassee will not be collected until the actual spawning season begins, about February 1980. Progeny from this operation will be held at a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service facility for further release.

Snail darters were transplanted to the Hiwassee River 4 years ago. The Hiwassee snail darters are known to be reproducing, but Fish and Wildlife Service biologists say it is still too early to know whether the colony will survive and become permanently established.

The recovery team considers the Holston River in the vicinity of Mascot, Tennessee, to be the best site for establishing a second transplant population. About 100 snail darters from the Hiwassee colony were transplanted to the Holston last year.

"The chances of long-term survival for these transplanted populations are not good, but we feel that it is our responsibility to do everything we can to prolong the snail darter's existence," said Hal O'Connor, Acting Associate Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Work on the Tellico Dam near Lenoir City had been halted by a U.S. 6th District Court of Appeals decision in February 1977 because of dangers posed to the snail darter. The Little Tennessee was the last known natural habitat of the species.

Construction of the Dam was resumed September 26 after President Carter signed an appropriations bill which exempted the project from the Endangered Species Act. Shoal areas above the Dam, where the fish spawn, will be flooded soon when the Dam is completed.

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